The Idiomatic Usage of the "Last-Days" Idiom in the Greek Bible

by Thomas Earl Franklin

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1 I slowly discovered that the expression "in the Last Days" is an idiomatic expression.

I read a short article in a religious magazine in late 1976. The magazine had been asked about the time of the fulfillment of the "last days" mentioned in 2 Timothy 3:1-7. Paul tells Timothy in 1 Tim. 3:1: "But know this, that in the last days grievous times shall come." The verses that follow tell Timothy how bad people were going to be in the last days. The article I referred to denied that those "last days" were fulfilled in the first century. I read the verses under discussion and understood immediately that the opinion of the magazine was wrong. Verse 5 says (ASV): "from these also turn away". The Douay says: "Now these avoid." Any reader can see that Paul was telling Timothy to avoid or turn away from certain bad people after Paul had died, but within Timothy's lifetime in the first century. Timothy would not be able to turn away from people 1900 years later after his death. The earth is still here and we still have days. How could Timothy have lived in the last days?

Philip Desprez is one of many who recognized that Timothy was alive in the "last days" that Paul talked about. He wrote the following in 1870, on page 238 of his book, called John or the Apocalypse of the New Testament:

> … St. Paul informs Timothy that '*in the last days* perilous times shall come, for men shall be lovers of their own selves,' &c., from such he is exhorted to 'turn away;' this command implying that the last days in which these monstrous forms of iniquity should be manifested were those in which Timothy was himself living.

I will repeatedly say throughout my booklet that the Greek expression translated "last days" means "hereafter" or "in the future". The Greek phrase is superlative in form, but not in meaning. A quick way to see this is by comparing 2 Timothy 3:1 with 1 Timothy 4:1 (American Standard Version):

> 1 Timothy 4:1: But the Spirit saith expressly, that <u>in later times</u> some shall fall away from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of demons,
> 2 Timothy 3:1: But know this, that <u>in the last days</u> grievous times shall come.

The Greek phrase (*εν υστεροις καιροις*, or *en husterois kairois*) and the English translation for 1 Timothy 4:1 are comparative, not superlative. A literal interpretation is intended. But in 2 Timothy 3:1, the Greek phrase (*εν εσχαταις ημεραις*, or *en eschatais hemerais*) is idiomatic. English translators, not understanding the idiom, translate the phrase literally. The two expressions were synonymous and interchangeable in Greek.

In both of the verses above, Paul is giving Timothy advice how to run his congregation, knowing that Paul himself would not be alive much longer (2 Tim. 4:6-7). Paul was warning of the imminent increase in the number of men like Phygellus and Hermogenes (2 Tim. 1:15), like Hymenaeus and Alexander (1 Tim. 1:18-20), and like Hymenaeus and Philetus (2 Tim. 2:17-18). Paul is warning Timothy of a later time in Timothy's own lifetime. That is why 2 Tim. 3:5 says that Timothy would be able to "turn away from" or "avoid" these men.

James Stuart Russell agreed that the "last days" are the same as the "latter times". He wrote on page 259 of the first edition of The Parousia:

> The 'last days' of this passage are evidently identical with the 'latter times' of 1 Tim. iv. 1. This is so obvious as to need no proof. … It is scarcely necessary to add that 'the last days' were the apostle's own days – the time then present. He is speaking, not of the distant future, but of a time already commencing … . Indications of the coming apostasy were already apparent, – 'of this sort are they,' etc. (ver. 6). It is assumed that Timothy would encounter those times, and those evil men from whom he is exhorted to turn away.

In this booklet, when I say "idiomatic expression", I mean an expression with a meaning that could never be guessed from the use of grammar and normal definitions of words. For example, if English becomes a dead language, a future translator will not understand the expressions "to feel blue" or "to be in a pickle" unless he can find them in enough English documents to deduce their meanings. The future translator would first try a literal translation using normal English vocabulary and grammar, and then he would realize that it didn't make sense. Whereupon, he would only be able to guess. Fortunately, enough contextual evidence has survived to reveal the correct idiomatic meaning of the phrase "in the last days".

When a student of the Bible is asked whether Timothy lived in the last days, he should answer: "Yes. Read the context." The Biblical authority should not add his own commentary to overrule 2 Timothy 3. I agree with James Stuart Russell that the "last days" 2 Timothy 3 are identical to the "latter times" of 1 Timothy 4. But I understand that this idea is not as obvious to most people as it is to him and to me. I will give more evidence of this in the pages that follow.

2 The phrase "in the last days", understood literally, requires a limitation of its meaning.

Philip Desprez, whom I quoted above, on page 239 of the same book, speaks of "the last days of the Jewish dispensation" and "the last days of the then existing age". About 1990, I learned that this is wrong. The expression is an idiomatic adverb and doesn't need an explanatory modifier. The expression "last days", literally interpreted, leaves the reader hanging in suspense. The reader might think that days will cease to exist. That could happen if the sun or the earth disappeared, or if the sun became dark. Or the reader might think that "the last days" are the last days of an age, a period of time, and that the Bible writer failed to identify it.

Edward Robinson wrote in one of the editions of his lexicon, under the entry for **εσχατος, ατη, τον**:

> Further, in the phrases *εν εσχαταις ημεραις, in the last* or *latter days*, Acts 2, 17. 2 Tim. 3, 1. James 5, 3; *επ εσχατου των ημερων,* Heb. 1, 1. 2 Pet. 3, 3; *εν καιρω εσχατω, in the last time,* 1 Pet. 1, 5; *εν καιρω εσχατω, in the last time*, Jude 18; *επ εσχατων των χρονων* 1 Pet. 1, 20: *εσχατη ωρα εστι, it is the last hour,* 1 John 2, 18 bis; all which refer to the last times of *ο αιων ουτος,* the times since the coming of Christ, in which the Jewish dispensation has come to an end, and the power of this world is in part broken, though it will be wholly destroyed only at his second advent, i.q. *τα τελη των αιωνων* 1 Cor. 10, 11; comp. in *αιων* no. 2. b, and *βασιλεια* no. 3. These expressions seem therefore strictly to cover the whole interval between the first and final advent of Christ; but they commonly refer more particularly to the period in which the sacred writers lived, adjacent to the first coming, in the last days of the old dispensation, as Acts 2, 17. Heb. 1,1. James 5, 3. 1 Pet. 1, 20. 2 Pet. 3, 3. 2 Tim. 3, 1. Jude 18. 1 John 2, 18 bis; elsewhere more to later times, before the second coming, as 1 Pet. 1, 5 ... .

The long lexicon quotation above is about the phrase that I say is idiomatic. He mentions a lot of the same verses that I will. He says that all of these passages refer "to the last times of *ο αιων ουτος*". Under his entry for *aion (αιων)*, he says, "according to the Jewish usage, *ο αιων ουτος, this age, this world,* the present scene and order of things in its course or flow … ." Robinson is saying something like this: that all the scriptures that he mentioned with the phrase "last days" require the reader to understand, to read into the text, or to subaud a prepositional phrase like "of the old dispensation" or "of the Jewish dispensation". But he did not explain to the reader why the Bible writers always forgot to write the appropriate prepositional phrase themselves. Robinson cited 1 Corinthians 10:11, which speaks of *τα τελη των αιωνων* ("the ends of the ages"). Notice that Paul remembered to use a prepositional phrase after *ta tele* (*τα τελη*). Even though Robinson didn't understand the difference, the reason that Paul limited the expression by saying "of the ages" was that *ta tele* did not signal an idiomatic expression, whereas the Greek phrase for "the last days" did.

Some old commentaries spoke of "the last days of the Jewish economy". Quotations throughout the rest of this article have similar expressions. Some people consider Pentecost of Acts 2 as the beginning of the new Christian age or dispensation. That kind of interpretation is wrong. Yet I think that I interpreted the expression "last days" that same way from late 1976 to 1990, at which time I figured out the idiomatic meaning of the phrase.

3 For centuries, some commentators have correctly understood that "in the last days" sometimes means something like "hereafter".

Richard Kidder wrote in a commentary in 1693[1]:

> 1. *In the last days: i.e.*, Hereafter. These words denote not any one precise time: These Predictions were to be fulfilled in Sundry times. And part of them extend to the time of the *Messiah*, which is called the last days, *Isa. 2. 2; Acts 2. 17; Heb. 1. 1*.

I found this footnote by Adam Clarke on 1 Tim. 4:1[2]:

> *In the latter times]* This does not necessarily imply the last ages of the world; but any times consequent to those in which the church then lived.

He wrote this note on 2 Tim. 3:1:

> Verse 1. *In the last days]* This often means the days of the Messiah; and is sometimes extended in its signification to the destruction of Jerusalem, as this was properly *the last days* of the Jewish state. But the phrase may mean any *future time*, whether *near* or *distant*.

In his comments on Genesis 49:1, Adam Clarke revealed a clear understanding of that passage, saying[3]:

> … It is evident from this, and indeed from the whole complexion of these important prophecies, that the twelve sons of Jacob had very little concern in them, *personally* considered; as they were to be fulfilled in the last days; i. e. in times remote from that period, and consequently to their *posterity*, and not to *themselves*, or to their *immediate families*.

If Richard Kidder had said that the phrase meant "hereafter" <u>in every occurrence</u>, and didn't make an exception for the Days of the Messiah, I think that he would deserve recognition for being the first to correctly explain the expression "in the last days". If Adam Clarke had written that the phrase <u>always</u> means "any future time", whether near or distant, and that it never has a special connotation of the days of the Messiah, then he would deserve that recognition.

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1 See Bibliography. From pages 243-44 of his comments on Genesis 49:1. Imprimatur: Octob. 24, 1693. Printed in 1694.

2 The New Testament of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, etc., by Adam Clarke.

3 The Holy Bible, Containing the Old and New Testaments, by Adam Clarke. The Old Testament. Volume I. Genesis to Deuteronomy. (New Edition, New York, 1837).

4 In Acts 2:17, "the last days" = "afterward".

Joel 2:28 says (in the Brenton translation of the LXX):

> And it shall come to pass afterward [*μετα ταυτα*], that I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions.

Acts 2:17 (ASV) says:

> And it shall be in the last days (*εν ταις εσχαταις ημεραις*), saith God, I will pour forth of my Spirit upon all flesh … .

Acts 2:33 explains the fulfillment:

> Being therefore by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he hath poured forth this, which ye see and hear.

The Greek phrase *meta tauta* literally means "after these things".

> Acts 13:20 (ASV): and after these things … .
> Greek text: και μετα ταυτα … .

And Brenton translated the expression that way here:

> Genesis 45:15 Brenton: … and after these things his brethren spoke to him.
> LXX text: … και μετα ταυτα ελαλησαν οι αδελφοι αυτου προς αυτον

So Joel had prophesied that "after these things", "in future times", "afterward" God would pour out his spirit. The fulfillment was during, or began during, the day of Pentecost.

Peter didn't change the meaning of Joel 2:28 in Acts 2:17. He knew that *εν ταις εσχαταις ημεραις (en tais eschatais hemerais)* was a synonym for *μετα ταυτα (meta tauta)*. It was a different way of saying the same thing. Brenton translated *μετα ταυτα* ("after these things") as "afterward". He could have used the word "hereafter" or the prepositional phrase "in future times". Peter could also have used the phrase that Paul used in 1 Tim. 4:1; he could have said that Joel 2:28 had said *εν υστεροις καιροις* ("in later times"). All of these expressions are near-synonyms.

Another thing to notice about this passage is that Peter was living in the last days, idiomatically meaning a future time from the point of view of the prophets. From his point of view, according to the rules of English, Peter was living in the "thereafter" of the prophets. But Peter was living in the "hereafter" of the prophets from their point of view. James 5:3 and Hebrews 1:1-2 also speak of the last days as if they were already present.

Also notice that the expression accepts the modifier "these" (*ταις; tais*). A modifier can destroy an idiom and make the words literal. For example, if you said that you pulled somebody's arm, the listener would take you literally, because the expression "to pull somebody's leg" is inflexible. If Peter had added an explanatory genitive and said "in these last days of the Jewish Economy", the phrase wouldn't be an idiom. It surprises me that Deut. 8:16 and Heb. 1:1-2 also use pronominal modifiers, yet retain the idiomatic meaning. It turns out that the Greek expressions meaning "in the last days" accept a lot of variation.

The last days of Acts 2 would probably only be the last days of 2 Timothy 3 if they were foreseen by the same prophecy. Acts 2 described the days foreseen by Joel 2. But Joel 2 didn't foresee the last days of 2 Timothy. As far as I can see, Paul foretold those last days based on types from the Hebrew Scriptures. Or maybe he projected the future based on what he could see, that is, based on the bad people who had already infiltrated Christianity. Or, Paul might have seen the future by means of the Holy Spirit (Acts 20:22-23, 28-30).

5 The difference in sentence construction indicates whether "in the last days" should be understood literally or idiomatically.

What I write below is boring. But you have to analyze sentence structure to understand the expression "in the last days" or else you will probably misunderstand the expression.

The construction of the idiomatic phrase simplest to understand, the one used so far, is:

> [the preposition, *εν*] + [the dative declension of the word for "last" with or without the definite article, *(ταις) εσχαταις*] + [the dative declension of the word for "days", *ημεραις*]

This idiomatic expression does not need and can not accept a modifier to specify the age that the day is the last of. Whenever this phrase is literal, the listener would expect to hear a modifier, such as an adjective or an explanatory prepositional phrase to define which days are spoken of. Otherwise, the listener would be left in suspense, like a person hearing an incomplete sentence. The words "last" and "days" both demand definition. The adverbial idiomatic expression "in the last days" rejects most modifiers. Most sentences with the literal word "days" don't make sense without a modifier. Commentators feel compelled to define or specify this phrase because they don't understand that the expression does not really mean "in the last days". It means "afterward". If the expression had been literal, the Bible writers would have provided the definition of the age that the days finalized.

The Greek word *hemerais* ("days") is literal in some passages that I will soon quote, and hence takes an epexegetical genitive, a defining phrase that follows the word and explains which days.

I don't know much Greek, but I know that some Greek grammars, like some Latin Grammars, do use the expression epexegetical genitive. This is also called by the same name in

Gildersleeve's Latin Grammar. Notice the example of "virtue". An epexegetical genitive is necessary to specify which virtue is meant.

> Gildersleeve **361.** … 2. *Epexegetical genitive*. — Genitive after such words as **genus**, class; **vitium**, *vice*; **culpa**, *fault*, etc. [**Virtutes**] **continentiae, gravitatis, iustitiae, fidei**, C., *Mur*. 10, 23; *the virtues of self-control, earnestness, justice, honour*.

The word "epexegetical" is in English dictionaries. But English doesn't have a genitive case. So a prepositional phrase following a noun could be called an epexegetical prepositional phrase if it defines or specifies. The following passages have epexegetical or explanatory genitives:

> Genesis 30:14 LXX (Brenton translation): And Ruben went in the day of barley-harvest [*εν ημερα θερισμου*], … .
> Numbers 10:10 LXX (Brenton translation): And *in the days of your gladness* [*εν ταις ημεραις της ευφροσυνης*] … .
> John 7:37 ASV: Now on the last day, the great day of the feast [*εν δε τη εσχατη ημερα τη μεγαλη της εορτης*], … .

If the explanatory genitives had not been supplied for the passages above, the readers wouldn't have been able to make enough sense out of what was said. For example, in John 7:37 above, the last day is literal and requires a specifying modifier, "of the feast", so as not to leave the readers in suspense. Compare that to the last day in passages such as John 11:24:

> Martha saith unto him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day [*εν τη εσχατη ημερα*].

The passage about the last day of the feast was written so that anybody who read the Greek language would understand it. But the verse about the resurrection used the expression "at the last day" according to a Hebrew idiomatic sense. Only a Greek Bible-reader would understand it. The reference is probably to "the end of the days" in Daniel 12:13. Greeks who didn't understand Semitic idioms would have wanted to ask whether days were going to cease to exist, or whether the writer had forgotten to finish his sentence.

The Greek word *hemerais* ("days") is literal in the passages below, but is defined by an adjective instead of a genitive phrase. It is not a form of the idiomatic phrase *εν ταις εσχαταις ημεραις* because it lacks the word *εσχαταις* ("last").

> Deuteronomy 26:3: … *εν ταις ημεραις εκειναις* … .
> Brenton translation: … in those days, … .
> Psalm 43:1 (44:1): … *εν ταις ημεραις αυτων εν ημεραις αρχαιαις* … .
> Brenton translation: … in their days, in the days of old … .
> Zechariah 8:9: … *κατισχυετωσαν αι χειρες υμων των ακουοντων εν ταις ημεραις ταυταις* … .
> Brenton translation: … Let your hands be strong, ye that hear in these days … .

Psalm 44:1 above, which is numbered 43:1 in the LXX, has both an explanatory genitive (*αυτων*, translated "their") and an adjective (*αρχαιαις*, translated "of old"). If you remove the modifiers from the above examples, the sentences don't quite make sense. If an ancient lector read those passages without modifiers, the audience would ask: "Which days?" But none of the passages about "the last days" that I discuss in this article have modifiers that precisely limit or define the days, because *εν ταις εσχαταις ημεραις* is an adverbial phrase and doesn't require or accept modifiers. The original reader who understood the idiom wouldn't have asked: "Which days?" The fact that the phrase was incomplete and didn't quite make sense was a signal to the listener that it should be understood figuratively.

The word *sunteleia* requires the specification of an age. And Bible writers provide it:

> Hebrews 9:26 ASV: … but now once at the end of the ages [*επι συντελεια των αιωνων*] hath he been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.
> Matthew 13:39 Young's Literal Translation: … and the harvest is a full end of the age [*συντελεια του αιωνος*], and the reapers are messengers.
> Matthew 28:20 Young's Literal Translation: … and lo, I am with you all the days — till the full end of the age [*συντελειας του αιωνος*].

In the verses above, *συντελειας* (*sunteleias*) is literal. As far I know, this Greek word is not used idiomatically; it is always limited by an explanatory genitive. But the expressions translated "last days" in the Greek Bible are idiomatic. That is why there is no specification of the last days of 1 Timothy 3:1 and Acts 2:17.

Commentators who presume to supply an epexegetical genitive are misguided by interpreting the words literally. Robert Jenkin wrote:

> By the last Days, in the Scriptures, must be meant either the last Days of the World, or the last Days of the Jewish State and Government, or the Days of the Gospel Dispensation; which are the last Days in respect of the Means and Opportunities of Salvation vouchsafed to Mankind[4].

This is all wrong. The expression doesn't need those prepositional phrases that Jenkin supplied.

4 From page 371 of The Reasonableness and Certainty of the Christian Religion, Vol. II. Second edition. (London, 1708).

6 Isaiah 2:2 and Micah 4:1 have two synonymous variants of the Greek expression "in the last days".

Isaiah 2:2 and Micah 4:1 are the same prophecy, but the Greek is in two forms. Brenton literally translated Isaiah 2:2 *εν ταις εσχαταις ημεραις* (*en tais eschatais hemerais*) as "in the last days". It is one simple prepositional phrase, constructed with the preposition *en* + the dative definite article and also a dative adjective, *tais eschatais* + the dative noun, *hemerais*, or, in English, "in" + modifiers + object of the preposition.

Brenton translated *επ εσχατων των ημερων* in Micah 4:1 similarly ("at the last days"), but the construction is different.

A comparison of Isaiah 2:2 and Micah 4:1 below shows that *εν ταις εσχαταις ημεραις* is a synonym for *επ εσχατων των ημερων*. The verses are synonymous, but written in different words. I show Brenton's translations of the two Greek phrases below:

> Isaiah 2:2: For in the last days [*εν ταις εσχαταις ημεραις*] the mountain of the Lord shall be glorious, and the house of God shall be on the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall come to it.
> Micah 4:1: And at the last days [*επ εσχατων των ημερων*] the mountain of the Lord shall be glorious, established on the tops of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and the peoples shall hasten to it.

Edward Robinson's Greek lexicon shows that both *epi* and *en* can signify time[5]. Under a long definition of the preposition epi in section I. "With the Genitive", he says:

> ... 2. Of *Time*, i.e. time *when*, as in Engl. *upon* a time, i. q. *on, at, in, during*; Heb. 1, 2 et 2 Pet. 3, 3 *επ εσχατων των ημερων*. … Of time as marked by cotemporary persons or events … Matt. 1, 11 *επι της μετοικεσιας Βαβ. at the time of*. Acts 11, 28 *επι Κλαυδιου*, in the days of, under. Mark 2, 26. Luke 3, 2. 4, 27. (Sept. Zech. 1, 1. … .)

In simpler English, he is saying that the preposition *epi*, which means "upon", can govern the genitive case to signify the time when something happens. He compares the usage to the English expression "upon a time". And he says that the phrase "upon a time" is *idem quod* (the same as) "on", "at", "in" or "during". He refers to two scriptures that I cover in this booklet, Hebrews 1 and 2 Peter 3. So the English reader just needs to understand the following from this definition: Even though the phrase under discussion looks very different when begun by the preposition *epi* compared to how it looks when begun by the preposition *en*, the phrases are the same. Both prepositions can construct a phrase signifying "in" or "during". The words that follow the prepositions look very different because they are forced into different grammatical cases by the different prepositions used.

5 See Bibliography.

2 Peter 3:3, which Robinson referred to, is translated correctly (for a literal translation) by the ASV:

> 2 Peter 3:3: knowing this first, that in the last days [*επ εσχατων των ημερων*] mockers shall come with mockery, walking after their own lusts,

Peter only meant "in the future". Bloomfield wrote in a footnote on the verse:

> Supply *μερους, hereafter*; the expression not denoting any precise time, but either a remote or soon approaching one, as best suits the context.

2 Peter 3:2 explains that Peter was referring to prophecies by the prophets and apostles in the past (compare Deut. 8:16, Hebrews 1:1-2, and James 5:3). The context of the passage is similar to that of 1 Timothy 4:1 and 2 Timothy 3:1. It has a meaning similar to that of the speech Paul gave to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20. Paul said "after my departing" in Acts 20:29. But he could have rephrased his sentence and said "in the last days", "later", or "hereafter".

Joshua 24:27 LXX has the same construction for the Greek phrase as shown here from the Brenton translation:

> And Joshua said to all the people, Behold, this stone shall be among you for a witness, for it has heard all the words that have been spoken to it by the Lord; for he has spoken to you this day; and this stone shall be among you for a witness in the last days [*επ εσχατων των ημερων*], whenever ye shall deal falsely with the Lord my God.

Compare with the Douay:

> And he said to all the people: Behold this stone shall be a testimony unto you, that it hath heard all the words of the Lord, which he hath spoken to you: lest perhaps hereafter you will deny it, and lye to the Lord.

Brenton translated the expression literally. The Douay translated from the Vulgate which ultimately originated in the Septuagint (LXX). But the Vulgate reads *postea*, which the Douay correctly translated "hereafter". Sabatier[6] said that the Old Latin (in the *Versio Antiqua* column), which preceded the Vulgate, read *in novissimis diebus*, which means "in the last days", which phrase the Vulgate changed to *postea*. After all, "in the last days" means "hereafter". English translations that are not influenced by the LXX don't have any word in this verse corresponding to "in the last days" or "hereafter". The meaning "hereafter" was implicit in the meaning of the verse, in Hebrew or any other language, from the fact that the stone was selected to "bear witness" in the future. Stones are used for monuments because they last for hundreds of years. Monuments are always made for hereafter.

6 See Bibliography.

Ezekiel 38:16 LXX says that Gog would come against the land of Israel *επ εσχατων των ημερων*. This is the same phrase and is correctly translated "in the last days" by Brenton. The phrase means "in the future", "later", or "hereafter".

So the point of this section is that a Greek writer who wanted to write "in the last days" could write it using two different prepositions which govern different cases. And as different as the phrases appear to us, they are synonymous and interchangeable. And both mean something like "afterward" or "in the future".

7 In Deuteronomy 8:16, the expression still means "afterward" when reflecting the point of view of somebody in the past; and it can accept a pronoun as a modifier.

Deuteronomy 8:16 says in Brenton's translation of the Septuagint:

> who fed thee with manna in the wilderness, which thou knewest not, and thy fathers knew not, that he might afflict thee, and thoroughly try thee, and do thee good <u>in thy latter days</u> [*επ εσχατων των ημερων σου*].

The expression is literally "in thy last days", but Brenton translated "in thy latter days". The phrase refers to the time after the Israelites would cross the Jordan, where there would be plenty of good things. The "good" mentioned in verse 16 is defined in verses 7-13 (ASV):

> For Jehovah thy God bringeth thee into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, flowing forth in valleys and hills; a land of wheat and barley, and vines and fig-trees and pomegranates; a land of olive-trees and honey; a land wherein thou shalt eat bread without scarceness, thou shalt not lack anything in it; a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills thou mayest dig copper. … lest, when thou hast eaten and art full, and hast built goodly houses, and dwelt therein; and when thy herds and thy flocks multiply, and thy silver and thy gold is multiplied, and all that thou hast is multiplied … .

The words were spoken by Moses to the Israelites just before the Israelites entered the Promised Land (Deut. 9:1). Moses dies in Joshua 1:1. The Israelites cross the Jordan in Joshua 3:17. The Israelites were still eating manna, but that stopped soon after the second telling of the Law in Deuteronomy, after they began to eat the good things of the Promised Land, as related in Joshua 5:11-12 (ASV):

> And they did eat of the produce of the land on the morrow after the passover, unleavened cakes and parched grain, in the selfsame day. And the manna ceased on the morrow, after they had eaten of the produce of the land; neither had the children of Israel manna any more; but they did eat of the fruit of the land of Canaan that year.

It is interesting that Deuteronomy 8:16 LXX uses the expression "in thy last days" from the perspective of 40 years before. God fed them with manna for 40 years with the intention of doing good for the Israelites "in thy latter days" (Brenton), "at thy latter end" (ASV), or, "in the last days of you" (an overly literal translation). If Joshua had referred to Moses' prophecy in English, he could have substituted "thereafter", for "in thy last days". But Moses would have needed to say "hereafter" because of the peculiarities of English. Either Moses or Joshua, speaking English, could have used the word "afterward". But "thereafter" means "after then" and "hereafter" means "after now".

When the last days of Deut. 8:16 were fulfilled, as described in the Book of Joshua, the Israelites could have spoken of "these last days". Compare Hebrews 1:1-2 in most translations, including Young's Literal Translation. "These last days" means "this thereafter". They all lived in a future time from the point of view of the ancient prophets.

It is remarkable that the idiom accepts a genitive pronoun, *σου* (= *sou* = "thy" or "your" or "of you"). This is reminiscent of *εν ταις εσχαταις ημεραις* in Acts 2:17, which had the modifier ταις ("the"). Yet that definite article didn't destroy the idiomatic meaning and make the expression literal. You can tell that the expression is idiomatic from the fact that it doesn't explain the age that the last days finalize.

I will discuss idiomatic expressions later.

8 Genesis 49 shows that "in the last days" meant "hereafter", not "in the last days of the world".

A previous section showed that *ep eschatōn ton hemeron (επ εσχατων των ημερων)*, in Micah 4:1, 2 Peter 3:3, Joshua 24:27, and Ezekiel 38:16, means "in the last days" just like *en tais eschatais hemerais* in 2 Timothy 3:1 and Isaiah 2:2.

Lancelot Brenton translated this expression literally in Genesis 49:1:

> And Jacob called his sons, and said to them, Assemble yourselves, that I may tell you what shall happen to you in the last days [*επ εσχατων των ημερων*]. Gather yourselves together, and hear me, sons of Jacob, hear Israel, hear your father.

Commentators often say that at least part of Jacob's prophecy has been fulfilled.

In 1694, Richard Kidder said in his comment on Genesis 49:1[7]:

> 1. In the last days: i.e., Hereafter. These words denote not any one precise time: These predictions were to be fulfilled in Sundry times. And part of them extend to the time of the Messiah, which is called the last days, Isa. 2. 2; Acts 2. 17; Heb. 1. 1.

7 Volume 1 of 2. Pages 243-244. I copied the original capitalization. See Bibliography.

Symon, Lord Bishop of Ely, said in its comments on Genesis 49:1[8] in 1695:

> *What shall be in the last Days.*] The Condition of your Posterity in future Times. *Jacob* is the first, that we read of, who particularly declared the future state of every one of his Sons, when he left the World.

Notice above that Symon (Simon Patrick) understood "in the last days" to mean "in future times", not literally the last days of some greater number of days, and not meaning "in the days of the Messiah". He says that Jacob was foretelling "the future state" of each of his sons. I will quote some of his commentary below, to give an idea of when and how these prophecies were fulfilled:

He continues in his commentary as follows:

> Ver. 3. *Reuben, &c.*] … *Thou art my first-born*.] So we read XXIX. 32. To whom the *Jews* commonly observe belonged three Prerogatives, a double Portion of the Father's Estate, the Priesthood, and the Kingdom, (as they speak) *i.e.* chief Authority among his Brethren. The first of these, saith the *Chaldee* Paraphrast was given to *Joseph*, the second to *Levi*, the third to *Judah*, because *Reuben* had forfeited all the Rights of his Primogeniture, by his Incest with his Father's Wife.

The prophecy about Reuben losing the right of the firstborn, as described above, was fulfilled about the time the Israelites entered the Promised Land and got land by lots. The commentary continues:

> Ver. 7. *Cursed be their Anger.*] … I will divide them in Jacob, &c.] This is the Punishment, which by a Prophetick Spirit he foretells God would inflict upon them: That they who were associated in Wickedness, should be disjoyned one from another; when his Children came to inherit the Land of *Canaan*. And so it fell out; for *Simeon's* Posterity had not a separate Inheritance by themselves, but only a Portion in the midst of the Tribe of *Judah*, as we read *Josh*. XIX. 1, 9 … . As for the Tribe of *Levi*, it is manifest they had no Inheritance alotted to them, among their Brethren; but were dispersed among all the Tribes: Having certain Cities assigned to them, with a little Land about them … .

The commentary continues:

> Ver. 8. *Judah, thou art he whom thy Brethren shall praise.*] … *Thy Hand shall be in the Neck of thy Enemies.*] To overthrow them, and bring them under: Which was eminently fulfilled in *David*, as he himself acknowledges, *Psalm* XVIII. 40. And so were the foregoing words; when all the Daughters of *Israel* came forth of their Cities singing his Praises in such an high strain, as offended *Saul*, 1 *Sam*. XVIII. 6, 7. … . *A Lion's whelp*.] This Tribe gave early proof of their Valour; being the first that went to fight against the *Canaanites*, after the death of *Joshua*,

8 A Commentary Upon the First Book of Moses, called Genesis, by Symon, Lord Bishop of ELY, (London, 1695). Pages 600-620. Comments on Gen. 49. I copied the original capitalization, italics, and spelling.

> *Judg*. I. 1, 2. And *David*, who was of this Tribe, when he was but a Youth, killed a Lion, and a bear, and the great Giant *Goliah*. … . Ver. 10. *The Scepter shall not depart from Judah*, &c.] … it is manifest *Jacob* here gives *Judah* the highest Superiority over his Brethren; and informs them, that from the time his Authority should be established, they should continue a Form of Government in this *Tribe*, till the coming of the *Messiah*.

The quotation above about Judah is a small part of Simon Patrick's explanation of the fulfillment of Jacob's prophecy about Judah. Part of it was fulfilled during the time of David. And part was to be fulfilled up to the time of the Messiah.

> Ver. 13. *Zebulon shall dwell at the Haven of the Sea.*] Near the Lake of *Tiberias*; called in Scripture the *Sea of Gallilee*.
> *He shall be an Haven for Ships.*] The Lot that fell to him extended from thence to the *Mediterranean*: Where there were Ports for Ships. … It is very much to be admired, That *Jacob* should foretell so many Years before-hand, the Situation of his Posterity in the Land of *Canaan*; when their several Portions fell to them by Lot, and not by their own choice, *Josh*. XIX. 10, 11. This could not have been, but by the Spirit of Prophecy. And it is remarkable also, that he mentions *Zebulon* before *Issachar*, who was his elder Brother, (XXX. 11[9].) for no other reason, that I can discern, but because *Zebulon's* Lot was to come up before *Issachar's*, in the Division of the Land: His being the *third*, and *Issachar's* the *fourth*, *Josh*. XIX. 10, 17.

Jacob's prophecy about Zebulon was fulfilled soon after the Israelites entered the Promised Land.

Since the tribes ceased to exist after the first century, the fulfillments must have been in the ancient past. So the last days of Jacob's deathbed prophecy are past, not something in the future. This is why Richard Kidder said that the expression "in the last days", translated from the Hebrew in Genesis 49, meant "hereafter" and why Simon Patrick said it meant "in future times". The plainness of the meaning of the chapter is probably the reason why most Bibles have some other expression to substitute for "in the last days" in this verse.

9 I think he meant to write Genesis 30:18 and 20.

9 James 5:3.

James 5:3 (ASV) uses the construction *en eschatais hemerais* like 2 Timothy 3:1 (and almost like Isaiah 2:2 and Acts 2:17, but without the definite article):

> Your gold and your silver are rusted; and their rust shall be for a testimony against you, and shall eat your flesh as fire. Ye have laid up your treasure in the last days [*εν εσχαταις ημεραις*].

The passage is a problem to people who believe that the last days are some far-off time like the Messianic Age or the end of the world. The reason for this is that James says that the people he is writing to had already laid up their treasures in the last days. How could they lay up treasures during a time that did not yet exist and was far off in the future?

This passage doesn't have to be so confusing. This was like the situation in Acts chapter 2, where Peter implied that he was living in the last days. The last days, the hereafter that the prophets spoke of, had come. Here, the "last days" were a time that was future from the ancient prophets' perspective, but present from James's perspective, during which time the people had stored up their treasure. The "last days" did not refer to a time of judgment that was still in the distant future. The people James was writing to were living during the "last days", meaning an afterwards or a thereafter that either the prophets or Jesus had spoken about. And Jesus added that all things would be fulfilled within one generation (Luke 21:32). Those latter days were going to end at the coming of the Lord, which was at hand (James 5:7-8). James was writing during the last days or latter times spoken of in the past, and all the things done by the people he wrote to, were all done during the prophesied last or latter days.

Commentaries and translations are divided on this scripture. Some commentators object to the idea that first-century Christians thought that they were living in the last days.

Edward Hayes Plumptre criticized the way the King James Version translators rendered the preposition[10] as if the last days were future, and as if the prepositional phrase referred to when their judgment would come. He said in a footnote on this verse[11]:

> *Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days]* Better, **Ye laid** (or, *ye have laid*) **up treasure in the last days**. The preposition cannot possibly have the sense of “for.” St James shared the belief of other New Testament writers that they were living in “the last days” of the world’s history, and that the “coming of the Lord” was nigh (1 John ii. 18; 1 Cor. xv. 51; 1 Thess. iv. 15). For those to whom he wrote the words had a very real truth. They were actually living in the “last days” of the polity of Israel. In the chaos and desolation of its fall their heaped-up treasures would avail but little. They would be marked out in proportion to their wealth, as the first to be attacked and plundered.

10 "for the last days"

11 From page 97 of The General Epistle of St. James With Notes and Introduction, by E.H. Plumptre (Cambridge, 1895).

I agree with Plumptre that James thought that those Christians were living in the last days. He may be right about the exact meaning of how some Christians "had laid up their treasure". But by speaking of the last days of the polity of Israel, Plumptre revealed that he didn't understand that "last days" = "afterwards" and doesn't need an explanatory modifier. They weren't living "in the 'last days' of the polity of Israel". They were living in the thereafter of Jesus's prophecy.

Christians weren't foolish for thinking that they were living in the last days. James Stuart Russell believed that the Lord did come during the destruction of Jerusalem. Philip S. Desprez taught the same in his earlier books. The Gospel of Luke indicates that the Son of Man returned to save faithful Christians some time in the first century.

James 5:3 has the normal idiomatic meaning of "last days", i. e., "in future times" or "afterwards". But it has to be translated "in the latter days" to be clear to English readers. Hebrews 1:1-2 also speaks of the last days that were spoken of by somebody in the past.

10 The construction with the genitive singular *εσχατου* (*eschatou*), meaning "in the last part of the days".

Some say that we should understand *μερους* (*merous*) after the singular form of the adjective *εσχατου* in Hebrews 1:1-2. In some verses in a previous chapter, the genitive adjectives and nouns agreed in case and number. But *eschatou* does not agree with *hemeron* in number. Yet the phrase would make grammatical sense if a singular noun were added. The word *μερους* is genitive singular, meaning "part". So the literal meaning of *επ εσχατου μερους των ημερων* is "in the last (part) of the days". The noun could have been omitted (suppressed), but meant to be understood[12]. Both *eschatōn* and *eschatou* exist in different manuscripts of Hebrews 1:1-2. I think that copyists knew that "in the last part of the days" was synonymous with "in the last days", and they knew that they both represented "in the latter days" in the Hebrew text. If the plural was original, then Heb. 1:1-2 simply means "in the last days" like Micah 4:1 and other verses discussed previously, the noun and its modifiers all agreeing with each other in grammatical number and case.

There are some passages besides the one in Hebrews with the singular adjective. Numbers 24:14 LXX Brenton says:

> And now, behold I return to my place; come, I will advise thee of what this people shall do to thy people in the last days [*επ εσχατου των ημερων*].

12 Thomas Nugent wrote in Book VII. Chapter I., "Of the first figure called ELLIPSIS: ... V. GENERAL MAXIM. Every adjective supposeth its substantive expressed or understood."

Brenton translated the phrase as if *εσχατου* ["last"] was plural and could modify "the days" [*των ημερων*]. But since it can't, it makes sense to follow the Parkhurst lexicon, which I will quote later, and supply the word *merous*, or "part". The expression was understood by the listener as "in the last part of the days".

Simon Patrick correctly interpreted the meaning in his commentary on this verse, but without explaining anything about his reason for doing so:

> In the latter days.] In future Ages.

Thomas Newton understood the meaning of the expression correctly, and he wrote this concerning the fulfillment of Numbers 24:14[13]:

> … and so Balaam proceeds to *advertise* Balak *what this people shall do to his people in the latter days*, by which phrase is meant the time to come, be it more or less remote … .
> *There shall come a star out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel.* The *star* and the *scepter* are probably metaphors borrowed from the ancient hieroglyphics, which much influenced the language of the east; and they evidently denote some eminent and illustrious king or ruler, whom he particularizes in the following words: *And shall smite the corners of Moab, or the princes of Moab* according to other versions. This was executed by David, for *he smote Moab, and measured them with a line, casting them down to the ground: even with two lines measured he, to put to death; and with one full line, to keep alive:* that is he destroyed two thirds, and saved one third alive: *and so the Moabites became David's servants, and brought gifts* (2 Sam. VIII. 2.)
> *And destroy all the children of Sheth.* … (3) Jerusalem Targum translates it *the sons of the east*, the Moabites lying east of Judea. Rabbi Nathan (4) says that *Sheth* is the name of a city in the border of Moab. Grotius (5) imagins *Sheth* to be the name of some famous king among the Moabites … . We see how exactly this prophecy hath been fulfilled in the person and actions of David: but most Jewish as well as Christian writers apply it, primarily perhaps to David, but ultimately to the Messiah, as the person chiefly intended, in whom it was to receive its full and entire completion.

I quoted only a small part of a commentary on the passage to show that most Jewish and Christian writers thought that the prophecy was future from Balaam's perspective, but that at least some of it is past from our perspective. Thomas Newton showed that he understood the idiomatic meaning of "in the last days" in this passage by saying: "the time to come, be it more or less remote". But he didn't give any detailed grammatical reasons.

All of the prophecy should be considered fulfilled. It refers to the time (then future) that the Israelites would subdue the Moabites (Num. 24:17). Edom (Num. 24:18) is also mentioned in the prophecy. Since there haven't been Moabite and Edomite nations for over 1500 years, an ancient last-days fulfillment is necessary (2 Samuel 8:1-2, quoted above).

13 Dissertations On the Prophecies, etc. See bibliography. Pages 130-135.

11 Examples of idiomatic expressions and periphrases.

An old Bible Commentary[14] gives two explanations of an expression in 1 Samuel 25:22. One explanation takes the words literally. The second understands them idiomatically. Many Bibles today translate with the idiomatic meaning: "male", "men", etc.:

> Ver. 22 … *Any that pisseth against the Wall.)*] That is (as the Generality of Interpreters think, *so much as a Dog;* This being, they take it, like that Saying of *Aurelian*, mentioned by *Vopiscus*, who going to a City, and finding the Gates shut against him, said in his Wrath, *Canem in hoc oppido non relinquam*, I will not leave a Dog in this Town. But *Bochartus* excepts to this *Interpretation*, that all Dogs do not piss against the Wall, but only the Males; and that not 'till they be six or eight Months old: as *Aristotle* and others observe. And therefore (to omit his other Reasons) he takes this Phrase to be a *Periphrasis* of a Man, as the *Hebrews* expound it, particularly *Ralbag*. So that it is as much as to say, *I will not leave a Man alive*.

If the idiomatic meaning is correct, the Hebrews who heard the expression didn't think about urination at all. All that registered in their minds was "man". Likewise, I say in this book that the Greek-speaking Jews understood "in the last days" simply as "afterwards".

That expression, "in the last days", can also be called a periphrasis[15] because it uses more words than "afterwards". The phrase "any that pisseth against the wall" (Douay and KJV) is a periphrasis if it is an idiomatic expression, because if it only means "any man", fewer words could have been used. If David was going to spare all males as long as they didn't urinate against a wall, then the expression is literal and it is not unnecessarily wordy. So in that case the expression is neither idiomatic nor a periphrasis. The ASV says "one man-child". The Jewish Publication Society Bible of 1917 says "so much as one male". Those translations interpreted the Hebrew expression as being idiomatic and they used fewer words in the translation.

English Bible-readers should re-examine the expression "last days", just as some commentators re-examined the aforementioned expression. The Greek-speaking Jews who used the Septuagint and the Christian Scriptures were likewise probably not normally aware of the literal meaning of what they were saying. The various synonyms and near-synonyms were interchangeable: *en tais eschatais hemerais, meta tauta, en husterois kairois*. Similarly "afterward", "hereafter", "later", "in future time", "in times to come" are near-synonyms and frequently interchangeable in English.

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14 From his comments on 1 Samuel 25:22 on page 260 of A Commentary Upon the Historical Books of the Old Testament, Vol. II. by Dr. Symon Patrick. See bibliography.

15 Samuel Johnson: "PERIPHRASIS … n. s. … Circumlocution; use of many words to express the sense of one: as, for death, we may say, the loss of life."

If you think about different idiomatic expressions in English, like "spill the beans" and "the squeaky wheel gets the grease", you will discover that they can accept some modifiers. But other expressions can't take modifiers without destroying the idiomatic meaning and forcing a literal interpretation. If you say "he always spills the beans", the listener will think you mean: "he always divulges secret information". But if you say "he spilled those beans", which sounds like a small modification, the listener might interpret the expression literally. Even if you believe that "in the last days" is idiomatic, at some point the idiom is destroyed and the listener constructs the meaning word by word, using the rules of grammar. Adding an explanatory genitive would certainly destroy the idiom. So "in the last days" meant "afterwards", but "the last days of Pompei" really meant the last days of that city. There were no more days for Pompei. The city ceased to exist. I show in this booklet that the expression can accept some modifiers and still retain the idiomatic meaning.

12 The most likely meaning of Hebrews 1:1-2.

Hebrews 1:1-2 (ASV) says:

> God, having of old time spoken unto the fathers in the prophets by divers portions and in divers manners, hath at the end of these days (*επ εσχατου των ημερων τουτων*) spoken unto us in his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom also he made the worlds.

A minor problem here is that the word for "last" (*eschatou*) is singular and can't modify the words for "these days", which are plural. Even though the Greek text they printed in their book contained the plural, *ep eschatōn*, Webster and Wilkinson explained the common reading *ep eschatou*, and said to add the word *merous*, meaning "part":

> *επ εσχατων*] Read *εσχατου*, sc. *μερους*[16] at the termination of the days of the Jewish dispensation[17].

The ASV translation is the result of a similar interpretation. There is not much difference between "at the end of these days" and "in the last [part] of these days".

Young's Literal Translation reads:

> In many parts, and many ways, God of old having spoken to the fathers in the prophets, in these last days did speak to us in a Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He did make the ages;

16 Webster and Wilkinson say in the footnote that the reader should understand *εσχατου*, the singular genitive, instead of *εσχατων*, the plural genitive. *Eschatou* is an adjective, and they are saying to supply the genitive singular of the Greek word for "part". So Webster & Wilkinson think the Greek text originally meant *επ εσχατου μερους*, "in the last part [of the days]".

17 I have mentioned elsewhere that it is incorrect to identify the period that the last days ends as the quotation above does ("the days of the Jewish dispensation"). If the authors had understood "last days" as an idiomatic expression meaning "afterward", they would have never specified the age which was terminating.

Young must have used a Greek text that had the word "last" in the plural. The plural number is required for Young's translation, so that *εσχατων* can agree with *ημερων* in number. If he would have supplied the word "part", which some say was understood, his translation would be a little different but have the same meaning.

So Hebrews 1:1-2 means something like what Acts 2 and James 5 mean. The author of Hebrews was living in the latter days prophesied by the ancient prophets. "These last days" must mean "this thereafter", or something like that.

13 Another possible interpretation and translation of Hebrews 1:1-2.

I will briefly mention an alternative translation that I have almost given up on. The idea is that *τουτων* ("of these") refers to the previously-mentioned prophets, not to the word "days". I gave up on the idea because of my superficial knowledge of Greek, and also because I thought that if the word referred to the ancient prophets, the phrase "of those" would have been used, not "of these". But after giving up on the idea I noticed that the ancient worthies including the prophets are called "these", not "those" in Hebrews 11 (verses 13, 32, 39). The Greek word for "these" used twice in Hebrews 11 is *ουτοι*. The word *τουτων* looks very different, but it is the genitive plural declension of *houtos* in all genders, whereas *houtoi* is the nominative masculine plural declension.

All translators that I know of have interpreted the modifier "these" to modify the word "days". But I thought that "these" might point to the prophets previously mentioned[18]. Whenever a pronoun stands alone, there is always an ellipsis of the noun. The obvious answer to this idea is that the pronoun is not alone, but that it modifies the word "days" which it is next to (*ημερων τουτων*). But is the obvious answer correct? Demonstrative pronouns are pronouns of pointing. But what is pointed at is not always clear.

Ambiguities are common in the Bible. Sometimes it is hard to figure what or who the antecedent of a pronoun is. For example, in John 21:15 Jesus asks Peter:

> Peter, Simon, son of John, lovest thou me more than these [*τουτων*]?

The same inexact demonstrative pronoun happens to be used as in the passage in question. People differ over whether "these" meant "these fish" or "these other disciples".

So if my unusual translation is correct, the author of Hebrews is speaking of the "last days of these prophets" instead of "these last days". The meaning would be either the latter days that the ancient prophets foretold, or else the latter days after the prophets died. But the basic meaning of Hebrews 1:1-2 would be left unchanged anyway.

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18 Thomas Nugent: Book VII. Chapter I. Of the first figure called ELLIPSIS: The first figure is called ELLIPSIS, that is, *defect* or *omission*, and this is of two sorts. For sometimes we ought to understand what is not at all mentioned in a sentence: and sometimes we understand a noun or a verb that has been already expressed, whether we take it in the same or in a different sense; this is what we call *Zeugma*.."

14 The adverb *εσχατον* with the same meaning.

In Henry Barclay Swete's Greek text, the adverb *εσχατον* is used with the genitive *παντων* in Mark 12:22. He says in a footnote on the Greek text of Mark 12:20-22[19]:

> *Εσχατον* is used adverbially as in Num xxxi. 2, Deut. xxxi. 27, 29 …, and with *παντων* in 1 Cor. xv. 8; Mt., Lc. substitute the more usual *υστερον*.

The word *εσχατον* was used in Greek without a preposition, but the meaning is the same in some passages as if the phrase had been written with *epi* + the genitive, or else with *en* + the dative. I will quote one of the verses cited by Swete (Deut. 31:29). Brenton's translation of Deut. 31:29-32:1 reads:

> For I know that after my death ye will utterly transgress, and turn aside out of the way which I have commanded you, and evils shall come upon you in the latter days [*εσχατον των ημερων*], because ye will do evil before the Lord, to provoke him to anger by the works of your hands. And Moses spoke all the words of this song even to the end, in the ears of the whole assembly.

Moses was speaking about some uncertain time in the future when the Israelites would turn aside into false worship. Brenton translated "in the latter days". He could have translated "at a future time" or "hereafter". So the adverb + genitive construction means the same as the other constructions I referred to earlier.

Simon Patrick gave a reasonable interpretation of Deut. 31:29[20]:

> Ver. 29. *For I know that after my death, you will utterly corrupt your selves.*] Fall to the foulest Idolatry. II *Judges* 19[21].)
> *And turn aside from the way which I have commanded you.*] Departing from that way of God, which I have delivered to you by his command. It was a very melancholy thing for Moses to leave the World in this belief, that all his pains would be lost upon them: but he comforted himself in doing his Duty to the very last, and omitting no means to secure them from Apostasy.
> *And evil will befal you in the latter days.*] This seems to express a foresight that they would not immediately revolt; but after the death of *Joshua*, and of the Elders who survived him, II *Judges* 7, 11, 12, &c.)
> *Because ye will do evil in the sight of the LORD, to provoke him to anger through the work of your hands.*] By making Images, after the manner of other Nations, and bowing down to them, and worshipping them, II *Judges* 12, 13. III. 7. where *the Groves* signifie the Images in the Groves.

19 In The Gospel According to St. Mark. See bibliography.

20 From A Commentary Upon the Fifth Book of Moses, Called Deuteronomy. See bibliography.

21 He means the second chapter of Judges, verse 19.

Simon Patrick did not say that the expression meant "in the last days of the world", but "in the latter days of Israel", when the Israelites apostatized by worshipping images.

Swete mentioned Num. 31:2:

> Brenton: Avenge the wrongs of the children of Israel on the Madianites, and afterwards [*εσχατον*] thou shalt be added to thy people.

Above Brenton translates *εσχατον* as the adverb "afterwards", which confirms that *εσχατον* can be an adverb. Swete mentioned Deut. 31:27:

> Brenton: For I know thy provocation, and thy stiff neck; for yet during my life with you at this day, ye have been provoking in your conduct toward God: how shall ye not also be so after my death [*εσχατον του θανατου μου*]?

Above, εσχατον is not a preposition but an adverb. Here is another example of an adverb modified by a genitive. Since Brenton translated *εσχατον* as "afterwards" in Num. 31:2 above, if he had been stubbornly consistent, he would have translated the phrase "afterwards of the death of me", or "afterwards of my death".

> Proverbs 29:21 Brenton: He that lives wantonly from a child, shall be a servant, and in the end [*εσχατον*] shall grieve over himself.

In the passage above, Brenton translated *eschaton* with an English adverbial prepositional phrase. Various English adverbs and adverbial phrases are used for *εσχατον* with similar meanings by lexicons and translators: "in the end", "afterwards", and "at the last". 1 Corinthians 15:8 (ASV) translates *eschaton* as "last":

> *and last of all* [*εσχατον δε παντων*], as to the child untimely born, he appeared to me also.

In the passage above, *εσχατον* is again used as an adverb[22] and modified by a genitive.

15 Variations of the expression that still seem to have the idiomatic meaning.

I am trying to explain the various expressions meaning "last days", but it is hard to know where to stop because of the surprising number of variations.

The dative case is used in Deut. 4:30 below, but the passage has the same idiomatic meaning. Notice that the word *εσχατω* below doesn't end in the letter *ν* ("n"), so it is dative singular, not genitive plural. Brenton translated the scripture as follows:

> And all these things shall come upon thee in the last days [*επ εσχατω*[23] *των ημερων*], and thou shalt turn to the Lord thy God, and shalt hearken to his voice

22 According to Edward Robinson's lexicon. See bibliography. Under the entry for *εσχατος, ατη, τον*: "… 2. Of time, *the last, the latest,* only in the later Greek … Neut. *εσχατον* as adv. 1 Cor. 15, 8 *εσχ. παντων* … ."

23 The word *εσχατω (eschato)* is dative singular; *ημερων (emeron)* is genitive plural.

The context shows that the Greek expression meant some indefinite time period after the Israelites had committed idolatry, at which time the Israelites would repent. The Douay translated "in the latter time"; the American Standard Version, "in the latter days". There is no adjunct like [in the last days] "of the Mosaic Economy", etc., because the expression only means "hereafter" and is therefore complete. Translations like "in latter days" or "in later days" would be good, since those expressions don't leave the readers in suspense awaiting the definition of the age that the days complete.

Simon Patrick, hundreds of years ago, said that he thought that the expression in Deut. 4:30 meant "in the latter days" or "in future times" (not "in the last days" of the world)[24]:

> Ver. 30. … *Even in the latter Days.*] In future Times, or in their most declining State. The Jews themselves apply this to the present State, wherein they now are, and have been many Years; as appears by the ancient *Nitzacon,* set forth lately by *Wagenseil,* p. 254. where he saith the whole Nation must repent, before God send Deliverance unto them.

I quoted Edward Robinson's lexicon elsewhere, which showed that *epi* plus the genitive can signify time. The same lexicon shows that *epi* plus the dative can signify time, too. In his long entry for *epi*, under section II., he says:

> II. With the DATIVE. ... 2. Of *Time,* i. e. time *when,* chiefly as marking a definite period, *upon, at, in*.
> a) Genr. Heb. 9, 26 *επι συντελεια των αιωνων*.

As an example of *epi* plus the dative to signify time "when", "upon", "at" or "in", he cited Hebrews 9:26, which uses the expression "at the end of the ages" [*επι συντελεια των αιωνων*]. The phrase "at the end of the ages" is similar to the expression "in the last days". The main difference is that the former expression is literal and requires an explanatory genitive to define the age, whereas the latter expression is idiomatic and can't take an explanatory genitive without destroying the idiomatic meaning. If the Greek words for "last days" were substituted for the Greek word for "end" in Heb. 9:26, the phrase would mean "the last days of the ages". It wouldn't mean "the hereafter of the ages" because the explanatory genitive destroys the idiomatic meaning. The example of Heb. 9:26 seems to show that the Greek language allows *epi* plus the dative interchangeably with *epi* plus the genitive and *en* plus the dative.

Jude 18 has another variation, substituting the word *chronon* for *hemeron*. It reads in the ASV:

> that they said to you, In the last time [*επ εσχατου του χρονου* (Robinson) or *εν εσχατω χρονω* (Bloomfield)] there shall be mockers, walking after their own ungodly lusts.

24 A Commentary Upon the Fifth Book of Moses, Called Deuteronomy. See bibliography.

This seems to be parallel to 2 Peter 3:3, which reads *επ εσχατων των ημερων*, one of the common expressions that I have mentioned that clearly means "in the last days". So I think that the differences in the phrase in Jude 18 cause no change in the meaning. This verse shows that the substitution of the word *chronon* doesn't destroy the idiomatic meaning of the phrase. I've covered the fact that it doesn't matter whether the word for "last" is singular or plural. And it isn't completely surprising that *chronon* would be used as a synonym for "days" since it can refer to a period of time. Jude 4 (ASV) says:

> For there are certain men crept in privily, even they who were of old written of beforehand unto this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

Jude is warning against a first-century apostasy that had already begun. The language sounds very similar to the language in 1 Timothy 4 and 2 Timothy 3, both of which use the expression "in the last days" or an equivalent, both actually meaning "afterward" or "in the future". These passages in 2 Peter 3 and in Jude refer to the future times predicted by prophets in the past, but being spoken of much later during the time of fulfillment.

The translators of the Septuagint spoke Greek, but were Jews and understood Hebrew idioms. They translated an idiom understandable to them, but probably not to gentile Greek-speakers. The first-century Greek-speaking Christians understood the Septuagint's literal translation of the Hebrew figurative expression without difficulty because they were Jews like the translators of the Septuagint. The New Testament writers used the same Greek literal translation of the Hebrew idiom. But some time later, when most Christians were gentiles, the expression began to be understood literally. The new readers thought that the expression implied an age.

16 How the correct understanding affects interpretation.

All the scriptures with the expression "last days" appear to a normal reader to be about the same period of time. After all, inexperienced readers might think that there is only one event in history as terrible as the phrase "last days" suggests. But since the expression only means "hereafter", these prophecies are not necessarily linked to each other. For example, the "hereafter" of Jacob's prophecies in Genesis 49 was very different from the "hereafter" of Deuteronomy 8:16. There is no suggestion or connotation in the expression "last days" of any of the following: of the Day of the Lord, of the parousia, of the epiphany, of the manifestation of Christ, or of Armageddon. The so-called Great Eschatological Prophecy in Matthew 24 does not actually use the words "last days". And the words "last days" in a prophecy does not necessarily refer to Matthew 24.

17 Summary.

The context of 2 Timothy 3 shows that Timothy was going to live "in the last days". 1 Timothy 4 is parallel and uses the expression "in later times". The last days of Acts 2:17 are the "after these things" of Joel. Brenton translated "after these things" as "afterward" in Joel. Peter was living in the last days, in the afterward that Joel prophesied. The fulfillments of the last days of Jacob's prophecies in Genesis 49 and of Balaam's prophecies can be learned by studying the rest of the Hebrew Scriptures.

A comparison of Isaiah 2:2 with Micah 4:1 shows that the expression can be constructed with the preposition *epi* + the genitive interchangeably with *en* + the dative, as in 2 Timothy 3:1 and Acts 2:17. Jude 18 is parallel to 2 Peter 3:3, showing that a Greek word for "time" can be used instead of the word for "days" without changing the idiom. The phrase "in the last days" is surprisingly flexible for an idiomatic expression. The fact that it is idiomatic is shown by the contexts in which it occurs. Also, the idiomatic expression "in the last days" never has an explanatory genitive, even though the expression would have to have one if it were used literally. Other Greek words that sound similar to "the last days", like *τελη* ("the ends") and *συντελεια* ("the end") do have limiting epexegetical genitives, the reason being that those phrases are literal, not idiomatic.

In Acts 20, Paul said that he knew that after he departed, "wolves" would oppress the congregation. 1 Timothy 4, 2 Timothy 3, 2 Peter 3, and Jude 18 were written in the same spirit. They foresaw that Christianity would be infiltrated by apostates.

The times of the fulfillments of "the last days" were not the same. Acts 2 fulfilled Joel 2. Jacob's prophecy in Genesis 49 was fulfilled at several different times recorded in the Hebrew Scriptures.

James 5:3 and Hebrews 11:1-2 speak of a time when the Christians were living in "the last days", meaning in the thereafter of the prophets.

So I claim that "in the last days" is an idiom, and the way the readers and listeners recognized it as such was the fact that, without being limited by an epexegetical genitive, it didn't make sense literally.

18 The sequence of events that led to this booklet.

I mentioned earlier how I discovered for the first time that the expression "last days" applied to the first century.

I continued to think that I didn't fully understand the expression. In the 1980's, I had a Hatch and Redpath concordance, an English-language Bible concordance, Brenton's Septuagint, probably a Strong's Concordance, and access to some Bible dictionaries. In 1990, I suddenly realized that the expression "last days" was idiomatic, meaning "in the future", and didn't imply the existence of an age that was going to end. I didn't have any college or theological training. But I tried to get a Bible magazine to publish the article.

A few days after I got a rejection letter, somebody sent me a copy of an article called "Eschatology and the 'End of Days'"[25]. I only had to read the article a few minutes to realize that his article had explained almost everything that I had explained. The article was written by George Wesley Buchanan and mentioned the seminary he was associated with. Despite the passage of 29 years, I wrote him a letter with a copy of what I had written, and acknowledged that he had beaten me to the idea. Amazingly, he was still at the seminary, and answered the letter.

He wrote me a letter from Wesley Theological Seminary, dated November 5, 1990. He mentioned that somebody else had written a similar article in 1967 or 1968, unaware of his own 1961 article. In answer to a question of mine, he said that "the most notable response" to his article had been "silence". I gathered from that that even if I had been the first with the idea, the world's response to me would have been silence.

I continued to think about this subject, and several years ago I examined the different Greek constructions translated as "the last days". I already knew what the phrase meant, but I didn't know why there were so many forms of the expression.

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25 "Eschatology and the 'End of Days.'" from the *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* Vol. 20, Number 3 (July, 1961).

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